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ABSTRACT

This paper draws a parallel between the social problems the United States faces today and the problems the country faced in the latter part of the 19th century. Contemporary efforts of educators to address social problems with new curricula can be likened to similar efforts made by 19th century educators. The 19th century effort included the introduction of "social education." Social education is described by discussing the popular teacher's handbook of the time, "Mistakes in Teaching" by James Laughlin Hughes. The main principles of social education, as conveyed in Hughes's book, were critical inquiry, citizenship education, and personal development. These principles presented a powerful rationale in the late 1800s for the inclusion of social subjects in the curriculum. These same principles remain pertinent to today's efforts to revitalize the social studies curriculum. (DB)

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Social Education to the Rescue!

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Social Education to the Rescue!

Is the United States dangling on the edge of a precipice? Many politicians and journalists seem to think so. They regularly tell how bad things are, and the statistics are indeed alarming. The drop-out rate for public schools is 29%. Among western nations, the United States has the highest rate of drug abuse. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, nearly 18 million Americans abuse alcohol, 3 million more than use cocaine. Twenty-five million adult Americans cannot read. These statistics may not be so unnerving as a drive through the blighted areas of New York, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles or any of the nation's cities. There squallor, suffering, and crime are daily on parade.¹ Yet such problems are not new. In the second half of the 1800s, when the United States was developing into an industrialized, urban nation, social critics pointed with dismay at the nation's mounting crime, suffering, and ignorance. Then as now, educators came to the rescue with new curricula. Today they offer moral education or a revitalized social studies program.² Then the panacea, social education, was a key component in a broader movement called the "new education."

The New Education

During the 1800s, Edward A. Sheldon of the Oswego Normal School, Henry Barnard, and Horace Mann introduced American teachers to what they called the "new education" from Europe. Originally a representation of the educational philosophies of Froebel and Pestalozzi,

the new education eventually became linked with the child-study movement and the educational philosophies of G. Stanley Hall, F.W. Parker, W.T. Harris, and John Dewey.³ This approach emphasized a student-centered curriculum for both elementary and secondary students. In contrast to the old methods of drill, rote memorization, and recitation, the new education stressed the humane treatment of children, the substitution of love for fear, inquiry learning, and community involvement. In the schools that implemented the new education, social education was an important emphasis.⁴

But one might well ask, What was social education? How did it find expression in a classroom? Perhaps the best answer to these questions is found in the popular teacher's handbook Mistakes in Teaching by James Laughlin Hughes. Originally published in 1877, Mistakes in Teaching was an immediate success. Between 1877 and 1906, it went through numerous printings by both American and European publishers, some of whom brought out pirated editions.⁵ In 1887 an elementary or high school teacher could purchase a cloth edition for only 40 cents. According to the advertisements, the book was appropriate for any teacher at any grade level.⁶ It was said to be one of only six books recommended by the New York State Department of Education for teachers who were preparing for the state certification examination. It was also advertised as a reading circle selection.⁷

James Laughlin Hughes

The popularity of Mistakes in Teaching can be attributed in part to the international

reputation of its author, James L. Hughes, who has been called "one of the most prominent figures among North American educators."⁸ Born in 1846 near Bowmanville, Ontario, Hughes was reared on a farm. He received most of his formal education in rural elementary and secondary schools. He never attended a college or university, but he did attend the Toronto Normal School. Between 1874 and 1914, he was inspector (superintendent) of the Toronto public school system, which became famous throughout North America under his leadership. Hughes inaugurated many reforms including manual training, cadet work, and domestic science. He also established the first kindergarten in Canada.⁹ He had many influential friends like F. W. Parker, Elizabeth Peabody, Henry Barnard, and Susan B. Anthony.¹⁰ In addition to Mistakes in Teaching, Hughes wrote over 20 books including history, spelling, and reading textbooks as well as biographies, histories, and poetry. He wrote hundreds of journal articles and speeches. His reputation was such that he was even considered for the post of president of Teachers College, Columbia University.¹¹ His prominence was certain to have extended the influence of his teacher's handbook. Mistakes in Teaching was one of a spate of books that promoted the new education. The mistakes Hughes alluded to in the title were those of an approach not in keeping with the philosophies of Pestalozzi and Froebel. In the 1895 edition, Hughes explained to his readers that many books were "too theoretical to be of much practical use to teachers in Public Schools." His four-inch by six-inch manual would give teachers a "thorough acquaintance with the details of school work" which were essential to their success in the classroom.¹² True to his word, Hughes provided his readers with many practical applications of the new education. His practicality was perhaps the main ingredient that distinguished his book from the rest.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

The teachers for whom Hughes wrote have been described as "overworked, ill-educated adolescent[s] minimally qualified or wholly untrained."¹³ Elementary teachers, most of whom were women, often had no training beyond elementary school. Many of these women bought books to help them prepare for examinations to enter normal school, to be certified, or to be interviewed for a teaching position. They might improve their teaching by participating in a state teacher's reading circle, which often had a prescribed course of study.¹⁴ Mistakes in Teaching was one of the recommended books that these women could afford. Thus, it became a handy reference guide to thousands of teachers.

The teacher who paged through Hughes' handbook found no pictures, charts, graphs or other visuals. Ninety-six mistakes in teaching were distributed through five chapters: "Mistakes in Aim," "Mistakes in School Management," "Mistakes in Discipline," "Mistakes in Methods," and "Mistakes in Moral Training." Each mistake was listed in the table of contents with a lead sentence and a page number. The ninety-six mistakes were numbered consecutively throughout the book. Within each chapter, after a restatement of the lead sentence from the table of contents, Hughes would explain why the teacher behavior was a mistake and how the teacher might correct the error. Explanations averaged from one to five paragraphs and consisted of concise sentences. The index was arranged alphabetically. Short statements and page numbers were used to guide the reader, e.g., "Classes reflect their teachers," and "Commands must be obeyed by all."

Hughes' Brand of Social Education

Hughes rarely made any specific mention of social education in Mistakes in Teaching; nevertheless, it was communicated throughout his book. Its main principles were critical inquiry, citizenship education, and personal development.

Critical inquiry. In preparing students for a life of enlightened discernment and intellectual enjoyment, Hughes urged teachers to teach their students how to think. It is a "Mistake to Make the Communication of Knowledge the Great Aim of Teaching," Hughes asserted. Though teachers could be expected to communicate some knowledge directly to their students, Hughes cautioned teachers about the crippling effect of not allowing students to gain knowledge independently for themselves through experiments and investigations. "Valuable as knowledge may be," he wrote, "the power to acquire it independently is better." Telling, lecturing, or sermonizing is not teaching, Hughes continued. As an alternative approach, Hughes suggested that teachers become facilitators of student learning. Teachers could help students learn how to select grounds for an opinion, uncover information, evaluate evidence, assemble facts, generate concepts, form generalizations, state conclusions, and apply knowledge. In other words, teachers and students should spend most of their time in school engaged in operative processes and other truly creative activities.¹⁵

Citizenship education. Another key principle in Hughes' approach to social education was his emphasis on citizenship education. It is a "Mistake to Neglect a Definite Training of the Moral Nature in School," Hughes said. Self-discipline is strengthened, he wrote, every time students do their duty by the rule of law. Hughes indicated that the proper sequence for moral

growth is feeling, thought, decision, and action. Every time students take the first few steps without completing the sequence, they necessarily "strengthen the habit of neglect of duty." Hughes concluded by saying that by the time students are ready to leave school, their moral character should be defined as follows: (a) They should show a willingness to cooperate with the laws of society; (b) they should have a "love of freedom" and a belief in the liberty of law, and (c) they should have a belief in their power and responsibility to effect social progress. On the latter point, Hughes lamented the many individuals who had untold intellectual powers of the highest degree but who lacked the motive for using their ability for the benefit of humanity. Teachers, Hughes wrote, would have fulfilled their duty to their students only when they had added to their students' body of knowledge, trained their students in how to acquire information accurately, developed in their students a love for knowledge, and helped formulate in their students the incentive to use their powers advantageously for the moral and social uplifting of the race.¹⁶

Personal development. Third in Hughes' principles of social education was his emphasis on the personal development of students. Long before the ideas were common place, Hughes wrote about child-centered curriculums and individualizing instruction. It is a "Mistake to Regard Knowledge as of Greater Importance than the Child," he remarked. Knowledge in itself is not power, Hughes said. A single individual, he wrote, is worth "infinitely more than all the knowledge that can be communicated to him or acquired by him." Man, not knowledge, has the power of development. Individuals, he declared, should continue to grow forever. Accordingly, Hughes urged teachers to deal with the child as well as with knowledge. The proper method of instruction, he concluded, recognizes the "necessity of a full development of

the natural faculties and the free exercise of them, but it gives them direction without seeming to do so."¹⁷

Effect on the Profession

There is no way to determine how much Hughes' Mistakes in Teaching affected the teachers who bought the book. Fifteen years after its initial publication, however, the influential teachers' associations began to support many of its aims. In 1892, the National Education Association's Committee of Ten or "History Ten," as it was called, set out to revamp the teaching of the social subjects. For most of the century, social subjects had been only a minor part of the public school curriculum.¹⁸ The main elementary school social subjects had been geography, United States history, and civics, i.e., state and federal constitutions. In the high schools, history had not often been taught as a separate subject. It might be combined with the classics, government, reading, or geography. Rote memorization and recitation were the usual teaching methods. Hoping to solve some of the problems brought on by the industrial revolution, History Ten endorsed many of the methods and goals associated with the new education. School districts were urged to adopt critical inquiry, citizenship education, and personal development as the primary aims of history and civics instruction.¹⁹ In addition, committees sponsored by other professional organizations made recommendations similar in nature to those of History Ten. In 1916, a National Education Association committee adopted the term "social studies" to mean the integration of the separate social subjects for the purpose

of citizenship education.²⁰ Yet policies set by national organizations sometimes have little effect on classroom activities. It is more probable that teachers used the forty-cent book, Mistakes in Teaching, with its numerous practical examples, to translate the principles of social education into everyday classroom practice.

Conclusion

Few of today's educators believe that social education, or any curriculum, is the panacea for the complex social problems of American society. Yet neither do they believe that curriculum is powerless. Today, as in the past, social studies educators are developing new curricula to prepare students to solve their own social problems as well as those of the larger society. Hughes' popular teacher training textbook may have been the only exposure some teachers had to a curriculum in social education for the public schools. The three principles of social education identified by Hughes--critical inquiry, citizenship education, and personal development--were a powerful rationale in the late 1800s for the inclusion of the social subjects in the curriculum; the principles remain a powerful rationale for the inclusion of the social studies curriculum today as social educators work toward a revitalization of the social studies curriculum. Hughes' insights into the principles continue to be of interest because they reflect the thinking of a century ago on how best to prepare individuals for living a better, more constructive life in a rapidly changing social environment. Some of Hughes' insights may still be relevant today.

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